

The material for this column was gathered below the town of Marfa, toward the Mexican border. Ever year, I go out there hunting. Adding a typewriter to the large amount of other equipment for the hunt is impossible. By the time I load all the gear I think I am going to forget, there isn't room in the pickup for a stub pencil, much less a portable typewriter.

Therefore, the material is gathered in note form, then transcribed back here at the ranch into column form.

The Big Bend country is capable of carrying more hunters than any other part of Texas. Marfa alone can road and sidewalk enough redcaps to stock the New England states. On the afternoon before the opening day, jeeps, campers, trucks, and station wagons are convoyed over several hundred miles of wide highways. What these hunters contribute to the red shirt and leather glove industry alone runs into piles of money. Gasoline grinders burn the clappers from the bells on their pumps; chili joint operators do such thriving business that hamburger griddles have to be retempered after the influx.

Without seeing the action, you cannot imagine the sights to behold. Hunting rigs pass, compete with indoor kitchen and outdoor restroom facilities. Old men lead the young to the hunting grounds. You see parties made up of grey whiskers with the smooth cheeks mixed in. Roadside parks stay full of hunters eating their lunches. Motel parking lots become so crowded the only way the no vacancy signs can be read is from the reflection off the car hoods.

At my campsite traffic is limited. Once the hunters arrive, the place takes on a roundup atmosphere. Roads are scarce on the ranch. Other than the ones leading to the waterings or corrals, they are designed for four-wheel or four-legged transportation.

Someday I'd like to take some of the road grader operators I've known over the rough spots. I think they'd find exactly that they've had in mind in curbing rural transportation when they plowed up the rocks back home. I know they'd admire the natural high centers.

Many different species of animal life besides deer live in the rocky wilderness. Ground squirrels the size of a big perfume bottle scurry among the rocks. They're too wild for close observation. The approach of a man sends them darting in their holes.

I tried several times to see what kind of claws they have. Any beast that can dig a hole in the Big Bend could be used to dig rock post holes in the Shortgrass Country in fact, a creature that can scratch the surface of these rocks should be able to drill a water well back home. I asked the foreman of the ranch to have his cowboy catch a pair of the squirrels, but I guess the continuous rifle fire had made him deaf, because he never did answer.

Yesterday one of the out of state hunters saw a large white bird high in the mountains. Since he wasn't working for the Audubon Society, I told him to go on and call the bird a highland swan after the Hereford cattle in the western parts. Water fowls could pass through here if they could fly non-stop from Houston to the Pacific Coast. Birds do change their flyways. I didn't see why a swan would be any more frightened of the Mexican eagles that abound out here than he would those jets in the heavier traveled airways. It looks like a jet age swan ought to be grateful to cruise around in eagle territory. Of course he'd have to learn to land on rocks. Putting down on one of these slopes would take a mite better pilot than hitting the Everglades does.

On the last evening, returning to camp, I watched a sunset that could not be reproduced on canvas or film. Brilliant light rays were being shot in spoke-like patterns from behind huge mountains. Southward, orange cloud streamers were floating in faint lines. In the dominant part of the horizon, violent white fire was framed by a dark V-shaped notch in the peaks. Northward, the scene faded into darkness.

Hunting is an excuse to go west. When man begins to move his highways to that land, he will have committed a crime that'll always be regretted.